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Mr A Harding
Headteacher
Birch Hill Primary School
Leppington
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 7WW

Dear Mr Harding

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Birch Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 June 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 29 and 30 June 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bracknell Forest.

Yours sincerely

Chris Nye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2010

- Raise achievement in English and mathematics and improve the quality of teaching and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers have an accurate grasp of expectations for each National Curriculum level
 - developing planning so that it effectively uses pupils' prior achievement to ensure that work set challenges all pupils, including the most able, to achieve their best
 - ensuring that the learning objective for each lesson is specific and clearly explained to pupils
 - making sure that pupils know and understand their targets in English and mathematics and that marking provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work
 - providing pupils with regular opportunities to be involved in evaluating their own learning and that of their peers.

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are effective in driving forward improvements by:
 - ensuring that all pupils' attainment is assessed regularly and the data are used to inform interventions
 - effectively using current data to gain a stronger grasp of pupils' progress, both within subjects and as pupils move through the school
 - improving the quality of monitoring so that there is a sharp focus on measuring the impact of initiatives on pupils' progress.

Special measures: monitoring of Birch Hill Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 29 June 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and met with the headteacher, senior staff, local authority brokered consultants and the Chair of the Governing Body, and undertook a telephone discussion with the chair of the management intervention board. With senior staff, he observed parts of four lessons and undertook a learning walk with the headteacher, visiting each class. He scrutinised pupils' work and a range of documentation, including minutes of meetings, strategic plans and assessment data.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection there have been no staffing or organisational changes and pupil numbers have remained stable.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils' achievement has improved since the last monitoring inspection, and although attainment and progress vary, the overall picture is one of improving standards and more rapid progress. This is particularly the case in reading throughout the school, which is a strength. In Key Stage 1 achievement is good because pupils have made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics this year. In Key Stage 2, progress in writing is swifter in those year groups where initiatives such as Talk for Writing have been fully embedded, but the school recognises the need to develop this further. In mathematics the emphasis on using and applying mathematical skills, for example in problem solving, is having a positive impact on improving attainment. However, this is still at a comparatively early stage and more needs to be done to ensure a sustained and secure impact on raising attainment in mathematics across the key stage. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work, confirmed by inspection evidence, indicates that the oldest pupils have made good progress and are attaining improved outcomes in English and mathematics.

Pupils say that they enjoy their learning. Because of well-targeted challenge and support, higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress, relative to their starting points, in reading, writing and mathematics.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons. They have very positive attitudes, particularly towards reading, and they say that they feel valued and well cared for by adults. In

spite of the school's best efforts to tighten its procedures to improve attendance, this remains average and has not improved since the last monitoring inspection. The school recognises the need to work with the local authority to address this.

The effectiveness of provision

The school rigorously monitors the quality of teaching, and inspection evidence confirms that this is mainly good and none is inadequate. Although, on occasions, the pace of lessons slows, the overall improvement in teaching is resulting in an improvement in pupils' achievement. A particular strength, which has become embedded since the last monitoring visit, is the way in which teachers are effectively planning work which is accurately meeting the needs of pupils with a wide range of abilities. This is clearly evident in the challenging and motivational tasks set by teachers, the good use of questioning to test and challenge pupils' understanding and in the improved quality of teacher's medium and short-term planning. In many classes pupils are being encouraged to identify when they will have successfully met the lessons' clearly identified learning objectives, and this is encouraging pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning. Information and communication technology, including visualisers, is being used very well to support teaching and learning. Pupils interviewed during the inspection said they felt that lessons were more interesting with tasks that are more challenging than in the past. A number said that they 'enjoyed learning from each other'.

At the previous monitoring inspection the school had established potentially effective systems to assess and track pupils' progress, but their impact was not then evident enough. These are now securely established throughout the school and their use is a significant factor in the improvement of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. This is because data are being used well to ensure that pupils' prior learning is being accurately assessed and built upon in lessons. Marking in science is not always sufficiently evaluative, but in English and mathematics it is consistently detailed and provides clear guidance to pupils on how they can improve their work. Pupils are very aware of their targets and are beginning to assess their own and others work, although this is not yet embedded sufficiently across the school.

Judgement

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Raise achievement in English and mathematics and improve the quality of teaching and assessment – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

At the last monitoring inspection the school had put in place a number of changes in leadership and management systems to address the weaknesses identified in the inspection report, but at that point it was too soon to judge their impact. There is

now secure evidence that leadership and management at all levels is a developing strength and is resulting in a significant improvement to the provision. Governors are much better informed about their roles and the school's strengths and weaknesses and are effectively supporting and challenging the school in its drive to improve. Under the effective leadership of the headteacher, the impact of the whole school commitment to improve is becoming even more evident. Senior staff work with increasing effectiveness as a coherent team and are rigorously monitoring the school's work, accurately analysing the impact of new initiatives and setting high expectations for future development. As a result, challenging targets are being met and the direction of travel remains a positive one.

Judgement

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are effective in driving forward improvements – good.

External support

Local authority support continues to be good because it is proportionate to the developing strengths of the school. It ensures that where weaknesses remain, training and support from local authority personnel or brokered consultants are suitable and effective, for example in mathematics. However, a strong emphasis has been placed on ensuring that the school is developing its own systems to sustain recent improvements, such as through supporting staff training in moderation. The management intervention board has continued to be a highly effective vehicle for monitoring and advising the school on its journey through special measures.